

Church of the Redeemer for Seamen of the Port
of Philadelphia and Their Families
Northwest corner of Front and Queen Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1077

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
263-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-1077

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER FOR SEAMEN
OF THE PORT OF PHILADELPHIA AND THEIR FAMILIESHABS
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263-

Address: Northwest corner of Front and Queen Streets,
Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Occupant
and Use: Vacant and not being maintained (1961).

Brief Statement
of Significance: A good example of the highly individual and bold
style of late 19th century Philadelphia.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The Churchmen's Missionary Association for Seamen in the Port of Philadelphia, which originally operated the "Floating Church of the Redeemer," bought four lots in 1872 at what was then Swanson and Catherine Streets. The cost was \$15,000. The building (1878) was consecrated on January 5, 1879 by the Right Reverend Stevens. The Churchmen's Missionary Association merged with the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia in 1922. Subsequently the building was purchased by Mrs. Jones Wister for use as a boys' club, which was under the direction of her nephew, Henry L. Levick. The club was later associated with the Crime Prevention Association of Philadelphia. The record of the Philadelphia Board of Revision of Taxes indicated (on July 19, 1963) that the Philadelphia Trust Company, Sabine, and W. Wister have been the trustees since November 1925.

Plaque in school building at stairway:

The Brewer School House
in memory of
Charles Brewer of
Pittsburg Pennsylvania
through whose liberal gift
this building has been erected for the moral
and religious benefit of the seamen of
the Port of Philadelphia
and their families 1878

2. Date of erection: Cornerstone laid on June 15, 1878.
3. Architect: Frank Furness (plans for church and parish house).

4. Builder: William and McNichols (at a cost of \$14,700, exclusive of furniture and gas).
5. Notes on alterations and additions: The following is from article by James C. Massey, "Frank Furness in the 1870's," Charette, p. 16:

"In 1878, The Churchmen's Missionary Association for Seamen in the Port of Philadelphia commissioned Frank Furness to design a new church and parish house at the northwest corner of Front and Queen Streets, that was intended for seamen, who were considered a group apart and in especial need of religious instruction. The Church of the Redeemer for Seamen and Their Families was interdenominational by charter, but closely allied with the Protestant Episcopal Church. The cornerstone of the new church was laid on June 15, 1878, and the completed buildings were consecrated on January 5 of the following year by the Rt. Reverend William Bacon Stevens, Bishop of the Diocese. The parish house was known as the 'Brewer School House' in honor of its donor, Charles Brewer of Pittsburgh.

"Furness' confident exuberance is very much in evidence here in a complex facade of many heavily textured parts, and the slightly projecting second floor and hooded dormer are familiar Furness motifs of particular note. On the Queen Street side of the nave are a pair of large curving struts built up of thirteen laminated timbers, and turned columnettes that support the projecting eaves overhead.

"Inside the church he used an unusual new framing system that eliminated columns between the nave and side aisles. The high-arched nave and low roofs over the side aisles are present, but in place of the usual nave arcades, Furness has placed a large truss with cusped infilling on each side from front to rear. This remarkable 'tour de force' also appears in Furness' First Unitarian Church built in 1886, at Chestnut and Van Felt Streets.

"The Church of the Redeemer still stands, although altered for use as a boys' club. It may be demolished in the near future to make way for a new highway."

6. Important old views: Exterior photograph - 1906, Philadelphia Historical Commission.
7. Sources of information: Massey, James C.: "Frank Furness in the 1870's; Some Lesser Known Buildings," Charette, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1963), pp. 13-16. Stockman mss.-Philadelphia Historical Commission.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A good example of the highly individual and bold style of late 19th century Architect Frank Furness.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimension: one and two stories; an irregular rectangle of about 60' x 100'.
2. Foundations: Random rubble stonework shows on exterior; below grade not known.
3. Wall construction: Stone, frame and brick. First floor and portions of second floor are random rubble stonework. Portions of second floor are slightly cantilevered from lower wall and are half-timbered, with brick infilling. The brickwork is laid in decorative pattern of soldier course diagonal panels and panels with "X" designs in dark headers. There are also some panels of slate consisting of both square-end and round-end slates.
4. Porches: On corner of building a one-story entrance porch fills out an inside angle; heavy stone pier at the corner with low stone arches to each wall; slate roof.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Doors are stained wood; entrance has double doors, three panels each; lower two panels are filled with diagonal boards; upper panel glazed.
 - b. Windows: Double-hung wooden sash; two-over-two lights, are most common. Those on second floor, Queen Street side, project up beyond roof as shed dormers with four-light panes over operating sash. Windows in church portion of building glazed with stained glass; monitor windows in roof along both sides of nave. Large window at Queen Street end of nave has three narrow arched sash topped by three square four-light sash; small operating panels in the outer arched sash.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Complex of many faceted gables and dormers; slate covering.

- b. Eaves: Handsome and complex projecting eaves, most supported by short, turned, decorative columns, which are in turn supported by arching brackets; dormer over entry projects with jerkin-head roof, giving hooded effect.
- c. Dormers: Several complex dormers and double window dormers with shed roofs, and single dormers with hood-like jerkin-head roofs.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

- 1. Floor plans: Basically two adjoining buildings, the church to the east on Front Street, a schoolhouse to the west, off Queen Street. The church portion has a north-south nave, the whole in a Greek cross plan formed by insets at the corners. At the north end is a projecting chancel. The school building to the west is a two-story structure. First floor has a center hall (north-south) with rooms to each side. Stairway is in projecting portion at north end of hall. Second floor in two large recesses.
- 2. Structure: The church building is notable for a remarkable structural system, giving the effect of an arched center aisle and lower side aisle in the traditional manner, but without column or piers. This device is typical of Furness, and is achieved by the use of very heavy trusses running north-south from front to rear between the center and side aisles. This truss in turn supports the arched center aisle ceiling, the sloping roof of the side aisles, and a row of monitor windows. These large trusses are of heavy timbers, of apparently redundant design consisting of square panels with a crossed "X" in each panel. The lower chord consists of two spaced members. There are iron rods used in tension joints. The nave ceiling is framed by somewhat rounded pointed arches constructed of trussed rafters that spring from these longitudinal trusses. These remarkable trusses also appear to continue through the end wall and show on the Queen Street facade, projecting about 2', and ending in turned posts that support the eaves. Also unusual are the brackets that arch out to support these projecting truss ends. They are laminated of thirteen one-inch boards.
- 3. Stairways: Main stair in projecting stair hall at rear of school building, at end of center hall; stairs have a single run to upstairs landing, then reverse back with two runs flanking the center run. Double run down to basement landing under upper part of stairs to second floor.

4. Flooring: Wood
5. Wall and ceiling finish: Board wainscoting. Ceiling of church nave has board finish.
6. Doors: Generally simple. Some more elaborate doors in chancel end of church building with four narrow panels in row. Tops of upper panels have pointed arches.
7. Trim: Fairly plain and simple except for some decorative trim in church, especially in chancel; here there are various Gothic inspired doors, pointed arch and quatrefoil motifs, wainscoting, and some decorative motifs on the trusses mostly of a trefoil nature.
8. Lighting: Electric lighting, quite ordinary. Stained glass windows in church, rather plain.
9. Heating: Central

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: On southeast corner of block in a city neighborhood.
2. Walks: Brick sidewalks.

Prepared by James C. Massey, Architect
National Park Service
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